Regional Outcomes June 2002
Pilot Skill Gap Assessment Model
Participating Workforce Development Councils: Tri-County WDC, Benton Franklin WDC, North Central WDC, the Eastern Washington Partnership

Four Workforce Development Councils identified a Washington WorkSource or SkillsSource , or a community based organization to identify the participants with employers in collaboration with five community colleges to administer the skill gap assessment model to a total of 97 participants in the 19 selected counties. Each region submitted reports on their experience and lessons learned in this process. This report shows some of the common or divergent experiences of each of the regions.

Overall, each of the four regions responded by stating that the skill gap assessment process was a positive experience. Most of the regions reported that both workers and employers were eager to try the individual assessments that made up the model and cooperative in working out worker and employer schedules. Several of the incumbent workers from the different regions were hesitant to take tests at first because they were concerned about how the results of the assessments would affect their job. When assured that they would not affect job security by their employers they readily agreed to participate. Although each region reported a favorable experience with the assessment process there were some concerns over the difficulty in coordinating times and locations to reach workers in remote locations. Each region used the same CASAS tool in sections one and two of the skill gap assessment process. Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council used the WorkKeys assessment instead of CASAS with one of their future/transitional workers. North Central Workforce Development Council used Career Scope and the Walla Walla region used ASSET along with CASAS for all their workers. All regions were able to administer the tests easily but there was difficulty in interpreting and understanding the scores as they relate to designing an individual training plan. One region requested more time in the future to discuss the results of the assessments with the workers.

The number of workers who participated in all three NOCTI tests – general manufacturing, skill standard specific paper pencil and on-site - varied widely from none in one region to six in another and eleven at another. Even though one Council did not have any of its workers take all three tests, twenty-three of their thirty-one participants moved through the NOCTI test to assess general manufacturing knowledge into job or industry specific general or technical training that helped upgrade their skills. Only one region provided an additional training course for those workers who needed more work in ESL, math, and reading after the assessments in section two. This region also required its participating workers to complete *Introduction to Food Processing* as a part of their training plan.. The other regions either reported not having any remedial instructional program in place for workers who were below ninth grade level in basic skills, or not having any participant workers under the required grade level. One exception in one region reported that all of its participant workers were at eighth grade level or above.

The most common types of training needed for future and transitional participants as identified by the skill gap assessments for two regions were Maintenance, Electrical/Electronics, Computer Control and PLC's. Every region reported that there was a need for industry relevant training in English for their incumbent workers, while another region reported a need for basic math and science skills as well. All regions except one reported that their workers needed more training in critical core competency areas such as Electrical/Electronics, Refrigeration and Maintenance. In one region there were a great number of qualified, even educated (in their country of origin) members of the workforce who were currently unemployed or underemployed. This pool of potential employees could vastly improve the productivity of the industry if curriculum directly relevant to the industry could be developed and made available throughout the region.

The general attitude of the participants in the skill gap assessment process was positive. All regions reported that their workers were excited and highly motivated to participate in the process. All were eager to improve, upgrade and learn new skills that could make them more competitive in the workforce. As mention earlier in this report, there was some anxiety from the incumbent workers over the nature of the tests and how it would affect their job security. When assured by their employers that it would not put their job in jeopardy, but only help them to improve their skills all were eager to participate.

The greatest challenge in the skill gap assessment process varied from region to region, but overall each reported some difficulty in coordinating the essential outcomes among workers, employers and instructors. One region reported that they also had some difficulty making sure that all supervisors understood and supported the assessment goals because some of their workers were participating in the skill gap assessment process. Another region reported difficulty working with the local community college because they wanted to fit workers into already existing training instead of tailoring programs to fit the participants and industry's needs. One unique challenge to this partnership in one region was that the STIWP program had already provided training in some areas before the skill gap assessment process. Small businesses had a difficult time letting people go for an additional 4 hours on paid time since their worker had already had some of the critical training needed.

The greatest success of the process also varied depending on the region. One region said that the overall cooperation and support towards the project by employers, workers and training staff made the process a success. Other regions also enjoyed this aspect of the project along with the valuable relationships that were developed with local employers. and yet others said that that the greatest success was the new skills that the workers learned while participating in the program.

Several participant stories captured the impact of the assessment process on some of the workers. Specialized training from Perry's Applied Technology Center helped Ron upgrade his skills and gain confidence that he could keep his job or gain advancement at the Haas Hexane Plant where he is the only Maintenance Mechanic. Similarly, in the Walla Walla region, Joe participated in the training in order to gain new

skills in an industry he was interested in and increase his chances of finding another job after a company closure. Both he and his family are grateful for the experience. Rick and Gary in Lower Yakima Valley received thirty six hours of customized training from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. three days a week because they needed training in working with farm equipment instead of production. They were both pleased and motivated to be able to participate in training customized to their needs. Finally, in Benton-Franklin, one worker scored a one hundred percent on one section of the NOCTI assessment and he left the experience with a greater confidence in his abilities.